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SOMETHING FOR TOKENS

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FREDERICK T. MACARTNEY



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SOMETHING FOR TOKENS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

DEWED PETALS 1912

EARTHEN VESSELS 1913

COMMERCIUM 1917

POEMS 1920

SOMETHING FOR TOKENS : POEMS Frederick T. Macartney

Plucking something for tokens, tossing toward whoever is
near me

Here, lilac, with a branch of pine,

Here, out of my pocket, some moss. . .

—WHITMAN

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
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VERONICA

The little flower veronica
Grows very far away,
But it is blue
As the eyes of you,
And shuts at night as they:
Its petals furl
To a threaded pearl
That hangs there till the day.

The wayside flower veronica
Grows meekly but grows wild:
It will not grace
A dwelling place;
But when black clouds are piled,
It shrinks till the rain
Has gone again,
Then laughs like a wet-eyed child.

That little flower, Veronica,
Dreams ever, as dream you,
Of bees, and of skies
Of butterflies
When there are one or two;
But still it knows
How the time goes,
And whether dreams come true.

THOUGHTS FOR PANSIES

This is for pansies
And their way
Of watching you with dusky glances
Like ladies bowed in church to pray—
Though here and there is one that ogles
Pedestrians with a bizarre
And sumptuous insolence, as of goggles
Of a magnate in a motor-car.

The rough geranium's means afford her
No frontage on the garden border;
But not so very long ago
You, pansies, shared with her a row
Of wooden slums, quite eager thence
To gossip with her from your box
Across the railings of the fence,
Nodding sly scandal:—how the phlox
Wore loud and clashing colors; what
A flirt was the forget-me-not;
Where the convolvulus went at night;
And that the rose was down with blight;
And whether the lily that lately died,
For all its airs and looks of pride,
Had lived in a hothouse once with some
Old Japanese chrysanthemum.

Smug little beauty!
Your middle-aged ideals of duty
Are not for my passionate violets sorrowing there
Beside you, sighing out their sweet despair
At finding all they give to love
Not half enough,
Patient in gardens, O but wild
At heart, and still unreconciled

To domesticity—while you,
Indulging every sensual hue,
Are satisfied with being wed
To comfort in a coddled bed.

FRUIT BLOSSOM

No loving excels
Ours that passed
With the Spring:
These syllables
Are the last
Of its petals fluttering.

The cares
She wears,
As then, are now
But blossom-flakes
That still dispute
The will of the bough
To bend with fruit
Until it breaks.

Gust of my heart,
Throwing a spray
Of hours
Like flowers
Across my way,
Now that is part
Of what has been,
I am not sad
But more serene.

OUT OF EARSHOT OF A DAINTY CALLER

My garden is so queer
That you, I fear,
Will there find nothing equal to
Your exquisite perfection through
Each nice
Device
Of pallid grace
On neck and face;
Of pearly fingers manicured
Bright as the bill of a drinking bird;
Illusions fashioning each limb
To flights of silken seraphim;
The mechanism of that snare
Of twisted honey, your yellow hair—
For, smothered in it, have not I
Seemed like the poor polluting fly
Whose wings to sweetness took the weight
That now its legs must extricate!

Surely no lover need resent
The salve that can a mouth assist
To such a delicate extent
As may be reasonably kissed,
Nor blame the combing out of lashes
To let light flicker through in flashes;
And, poem-lady, if your feet
Are inly mangled, yet how neat
Each ankle poises, as to fly,
Ever so little, toward the sky!

To serve
Your end,
Your skill you spend
With a reserve
Discreet as any sabbath bell
Propounding its alarm of hell.

LOVE-BIRD CAUGHT FOR A LADY-LOVE

A sudden little thought of you
Has come to me
Out of the blue
Of the air or the green of a tree,
Like a bright
Happy bird
That you heard
And wished to come near and alight.

So I fashion a cage line by line
To confine
The delicate thing,
That you may for a while,
With a smile,
Hear it sing.

So many fly past,
And some
Are gone when they come;
But I hold this one fast
Within filigree bars
Made of metal of stars.

When you open the door,
This joy
(A toy
If no more)
Will hop out on your shoulder,
Grow bolder,
And make in your ear
Three sounds full of love,
Just as here
The dainty wild dove
Makes of three notes one song
For its mate all day long.

Then let it go free
Altogether.
It will fly north to be
Amid the bright weather.
Skies cooler are duller.
Here frost never pinches
Its playfellow finches,
Whose ardours of colour
Thus presage
My message.

TO R.H.L., OF THE COMPANY HE KEEPS

I go not as you go, with dear delaying
Where infant flowers of the spring are strewn
In frolic with warm winds that gently croon
Above them if they tire of too much playing;
Nor may I follow, when the hours are fraying
To threads of sunset in the afternoon,
The silver footprints of the vagrant moon,
Without a sudden fear of too far straying.

Ask your companions whether they remember
A stranger who, with many a stooping pause,
Walked with you in the days when winter draws
Aside at noonday—ask that little ember
The peaflower, smouldering underneath
The grasses; ask the orchid; ask the heath.

EARLY SUMMER SEA-TRYST

White hummocks here are rounded to a thigh
And knee of naked sand: with stretching limbs
The season wakens full of drowsy whims,
Propped on an elbow, a knuckle at each eye.
From the far haze of merging sea and sky
A slow swell comes—a storm asleep—and skims
The sunny shallows to the rippled rims,
There folded like a garment and put by.

I will forswear my spouse, the lawful earth,
Haggling akimbo at her harbour gate,
With cranes for arms, and aproned by a quay.
Her household constancy has nothing worth
The trembling clasp in which I consummate
The passion of my body for the sea.

PENANCE FOR DAYS INDOORS

This healing penance shall be done
For sins committed against the sun
And the fresh air: above my head
The simple shelter of a shed
Rough-roofed with iron; and to the ground
I shall submit my body, bound
With heavy fetters of fatigue
Linked by the chains of many a league
Of hilly trudging, till the dawn
Releases me to stretch and yawn.
The little naked pattering
Of birds above my head shall bring
Their quick distrust to hurt my heart;
The thrush shall wound me like a dart;
Nor shall I shrink to make amends
When on my memory descends
The coachwhip's lash, stinging the pale
Sweet-aching scar of each old wale.
I shall not mind the rending rack
Of thorny bushes, for the track
Attains the blessedness of skies
Nursing a valley that supplies
Rich grapes for eucharistic wine,
And clusters drooping on the vine
For one who there repents his deeds
With bacchanalian rosary-beads.

PRAYER WITH A WREATH FOR THE GRAVE OF A DEPARTED DAMSEL

Grant that she rest indeed,
With eyes closed to the glare
Of gaudy things: her need
Was rest; and now she has her share!

Yet this will not suffice a soul
So evanescent to control.
From earth's exhaustion she will rise,
Mingling dismay with her surprise,
As when, awaking late from sleep,
White movements of her limbs would leap.
The shroud shall from her spirit fall,
Leaving it naked to appal
Remembrance of each sight and touch
Of body, which she loved so much.
She will seek tears, as the sun the spray
To give its rainbow-beauty play:
All will escape her—even this!
Her mouth, red incarnated kiss,
Shall be as the rose robbed from the tree
That was so proud of it; her hands
Remote as distant deeds preserved
In far traditions of old lands.
No more her white arms shall be curved
Behind her head, thrown back to sway
Her hair, while snowdrop finger-tips
Gleam whiter in this golden ray
From brows that not a care equips.

Since immortality confutes
All her essential attributes,
Grant her a fresh
Assumption of the flesh!

That she in perfect grace may dwell,
Give her expensive gowns as well.

POPPIES: OF A DANSEUSE

With motions that copy
The waves of a breeze ruffling gently the tissue
Of petals that issue
From the deep fragrant heart of a poppy,
Swells each flirt
Of the red
Of your billowing skirt
Round the backward repose of your darkly-coiled
head.

And how
Does your brow
Keep calmly its light,
As flesh-pallid poppies illumine the night,
All the while
That your mouth breathes a smile?

Your symmetry so
Enigmatic
And slow
Has the languor ecstatic
Of poppies that swoon
With the lust of the noon.

And in the palpitant whirl of the rush
(Like the trill of a thrush)
To a consummate poise
Without noise,
The curl of the textural flame,
Clutching the sombre silk gleam of your hose,
Seems the same
As a burnt gully knows
And remembers
Where on a stalk charred by dead embers
A bush poppy blows.

FROG-SONG FOR DECADENTS

One frog makes mellow music than the rest.
A viscid beauty rots
Such spots
As this
Of his.
Each hoofed thing passes
The bright, unwholesome grasses.
Here only the snake durst
Indulge its thirst.
Fantastic weeds
Drop their promiscuous seeds
And flowers, which fawn
Upon green spawn.
At night
The pool is bright
With fireflies: each one darts
Pale radiance from its nether parts,
Perverse
As the frog's terse
Rain-glutted sound,
Which seems the more profound
Amid rank scents
And stagnant elements:
So to his fellows he becomes sublime,
Singing the magic of their mutual slime.

A LAUREL FOR FURNLEY MAURICE

You, O my friend, will soar with the sublime
And best of all our country. I could stretch
Prediction further; it would scarcely reach
At crossing oceans out beyond our clime.
The universal sorrow of your rhyme
Invites brave hopes, as the wide sea a ketch;
But still you are as one who stoops to fetch
And carry trifles at the proper time.

I beg of you to do me not the wrong
Of tribute to a mere artificer.
Though I but sail a trim kite where you fly,
The griefs that fertilise the roots of song
Unite us both in knowing how men err
Through praising life until they fear to die.

OLD-FASHIONED NEIGHBOR-POETS

Move on, O brothers! move on or make way!

Though we may never shine among the great,
Not for a moment longer will we wait
Upon your slow feet. I have read to-day
Queer modern verses, prose-thoughts gone astray,
Mad as a schoolboy's drawing on a slate:
I laughed at them; but you—you make me hate
Your shelves of fine thoughts in such neat array.

Look at this slop-made sonnet, ready-cut
Exact to pattern, body, arm and leg:
These things we younger poets still endure!
Using your themes and manner, we are but
Blind men who jingle loudly what they beg
At corners in the streets of literature.

DECOLLETE: APROPOS OF LILIES

Dear lily ladies, this brave show
Is merely braggadocio
Of a caitiff's rapier,
Displayed with subtle skill to guess
A safe demur
With nakedness,
And more by favour than by right
Secure from what it would incite.

Cool lilies, glittering as with frost,
The fragrance that upon you clogs
Leads pattering pulses on like dogs
Sniffing pleased from post to post.
Consider the lilies of the field:
They neither toil
For emanations of the soil
Where they have origin,
Nor spin
A lure of graces half-concealed.

Delightful lilies! still the same
As when barbaric heroes came
To pluck you?—not the least
Of luxuries for a triumphal feast!
Yet progress proves
That it removes
This inequality,
Since we
Have weaker wills and passions now
Than healthy men
Had then,
Else we would surely glow
With your incentives more than thus
To analyse a stimulus.

EVERLASTINGS

Though you flatter them
With a name,
The wind shall scatter them
Just the same!
The future need
Is the seed.

Life has its worth
In all that lies
Above the earth
And under the skies.
It weakens when it clings
To hopes beyond
The joyful bond
Of sweet terrestrial things.

O I have watched (and have not you?)
The tinselled dawn-dance of the dew,
When the first lark sings where the last star shone;
I have slipped to sleep from the thoughts that swoon
When the somnolent yellow of afternoon
Is glazed with gauze where a bee goes on
Begging at the porch of each flower for honey
In a paddock sorrel-flushed and sunny.
I have lain in love, and alone have lain,
In a lap of grass on the knoll-kneed plain,
Biting a blade for the taste of its tang,
When the first star shines where the last lark sang.

(Love is a rose, and each pulse a bud,
And the sap of the rose is the heartward blood,
Which moons of remembrance sway to sigh
In sterterous caves that the ebb left dry.
Ah! sorrow for life's dear lost sweethearting,
When a single tear at the hour of parting
Trailed through spaces of time afar
Like the sweep of a catastrophic star.)

And I have sought, in the noisy towns
Where puckered application frowns,
Mean pence of profit: these suffice
To weight the dead lids of stark eyes.

I worship wisdom well enough
To know the worth of knowledge vast.
I watch the pedant present cuff
The stupid errors of the past,
While the wise future waits to whip
The present for bad scholarship.

Delights of the field, the flesh, the mind,
In one brain focussed and combined,
Are as the petals of one bloom:
How shall a flower pass to be
A disembodied symmetry,
Surpassing in its faded doom
The shape, the substance, the fine plan
In which its purposed life began?

Doubt not: for mortals yet may gain
An immortality of earth .
In race perfected to contain
Love, beauty, wisdom, and all worth
Of nature: you and I,
We die,
Dizzy with time's
Recurring rhymes;
But they—
Gods with no child's hour for a day,
Or a youth's month for a year,
Or a man's time speeding to his fear—
For them sun, moon, and stars would strew
One instant with eternal dew,
And all we dream of realise
The vision of their actual eyes.

Though, everlastings, you should be
A symbol of immortality,
You are plucked from the song and the breath
Of paddocks where you love to wave.
Our dreams are tribute unto death.
I found these flowers on a grave.

A PATTERN OF ROSES FOR AUTUMN

You that love roses, now the rose is dead
What garland can I give you but a song?
The falling leaves about me softly spread
Old-gold of old-world gardens, till I dread
Remembrance of their green when days were long.

The city's clamour drifts upon the air;
Men's voices leave me desolate; I yearn
To passions which like scarlet roses burn
And like them languish, drowsy with despair
That cherishes their promise of return.

You that love roses, now the rose is dead
My heart seems like the rose; and if I wrong
The rose's grace by offering instead
Such fancies as full roses dying shed,
What garland can I give you but a song,
You that love roses, now the rose is dead?

TO THE BLUE WREN

When first
You burst
The walls of paradise,
Your swoop,
Swift and deep,
Down and down,
Cut the skies,
Flashing through
An imprisoning circle of blue,
Like the leap
Of the pet of a troupe
Through the flimsy-filled hoop
Held up by the clown;
And those bits of the sky
That cling
To your head and your wing
Left a gap there on high
That we look at afar
As a ragged-edged star.

When you went thither
Were you a spirit
Passed to its merit?
Why came you hither?

I have hardly a doubt
That the robin, with flame
On his breast, was as quick
With the same
Little trick,
Disliking all nether
Delights, as did you
The celestial few;
For I see you about
A good deal together.

You and he, I should say,
When you two
Had your day
And lived as I do,
Loved women and wine:
He loved most the latter,
Which he spilt, as he drank, down the fine
Snowy linen he wore,
While he staggered and swore
In the midst of a roystering clatter.

The ladies love poets: they loved you, but not for
your song;
And they, when you loved them, were only the symbols
of love, for you loved no one long.
In the pride
Of your manhood you died,
Unforgiven
By them (how they cried!),
And unshriven.

But one, who, alas! knew your sin
Far better
Than any
(How could you forget her?),
Knelt late
On many and many
A night
To open the edge
Of the heavenly gate
With the ivory wedge
Of her white
Praying hands,
That your soul might slip in
To invisible lands
Of impalpable bliss
(Did she think of a kiss?);

Yet she should have known,
Had she thought
As she ought,
How sad and alone
You would be when once there;
And this happened, indeed, through her prayer.

It is fitting to trace
To the fullest extent
Retribution achieved
Through the strange instrument
Of one who believed
That a requiem brings
Salvation—reprieved
In this curious case
By a soul's flight from grace
On impenitent wings.

If all this is not true,
Little warbler superb with your boy-cap of blue,
I will listen no more to the scandalous words
Of the people who call you the mormon of birds.

BOUQUET FOR A SENTIMENTALIST

Dear soul, though melting sweets may fitly be
Preserved in shining tinfoil of a song,
Believe me, you do poetry more wrong
Than I, who would have faith and fact agree.
Corroding waters of the bitter sea
Sift the unstable gravel from the strong
Intrepid rock, and wholesome powers belong
To winds that fret the forest's filigree.

You worship flowers: here are some: the shape
Or habit of each one of them applies:—
The sundew feeding on unwary flies;
Snapdragons with their silly mouths agape;
And daisies, whose fresh artlessness you ape
With upturned whites of deprecating eyes.

ORCHIDS

Earth, fearing lest her lovers tire,
Aloof holds lilies for
First adolescence to adore.
To feed the fire
Of young desire
She throws
A rose.
When these are gone,
She has the black delight
That poppies shut their palms upon
At night.

What, then, is left?
Ah! she is deft,
Withholding
Or unfolding.
She has fantastic, delicate
And intimate
Perversity of bliss:
Orchids are this.

REMEMBRANCE FOR ROSEMARY.

I was almost forgetting the little hedge that went
Round about the flower-beds to make the flowers content.

My greybeard great-grandfather always kept it trim.
He had an old-world wisdom that I lost in losing him.
He built a queer house with porches and gables
Where a boy could hide, or sit and listen to old fables.
He planted an orchard with apricots and plums.
He had more love for oaks and elms than wattle trees
and gums;

But most he loved the rosemary, clipping it neat,
While I walked behind him, crushing with my feet
The tiny sprigs that fell, for the sweet smell they had;
But now I would forget again; it all makes me sad;
Though then I scoffed to find he loved flowers more
than games,
And laughed to hear him calling them by their familiar
names.

If he had not been old or I had not been young,
He might have rued my manners, and I might have
feared his tongue.



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